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HUMES, HARRY: On This or That Side (1967) Directed by:  
Dr. Robert Watson. pp. 53.

This thesis consists of thirty-three poems which are concerned with change and the effect of the imagination on experience. In the poems it is primarily the imagination which attempts to give a meaning, an order, and a direction to life. More specifically, the poems recognize the need for action or striving in a world that appears indifferent to individual action.

The central poem is "On This or That Side of Breaking"; the other poems support and make more concrete the prevailing theme of the above poem.

Although they cannot be called "nature poems", many of the compositions rely on imagery taken from nature; and, generally, rhyme and meter are used to enhance the sound of the poems.

ON THIS OR THAT SIDE

by

Harry Humes

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Boy on a Rocking Chair

Taller than he, adrift  
On a hardwood sea, the chair  
Rolled hard, maybe the last wind ship  
Tacking toward a leeward shore;  
And he, smaller, hands on tiller,  
Maybe taller than the tale  
I read on shore, a safer couch  
Anchored to the fireplace; taller  
Still than cracker-barrel nights  
Around stoves, pot-bellied courage  
And remorse. My voice droned on.

His tale was not mine, his ship  
The ship I'd seen before, left  
Grounded in another house,  
My father's, a skeleton of sand.

I could not tell him that, that  
There were smaller ships, and  
Shorter tacks; and, fore and aft,  
A humbler tale, of land already won,  
Burning in the open fireplace.

His course wide out, he sailed  
His tall chair down his early sea,  
His masts, as all men's once, are lean;  
And in his wake, my voice droned on.



An Ordinary Park with Swings

One night he walked  
And found a deep-treed park,  
Some swings, and stalked,  
Remembering how, above the dark;

Pumped higher, higher till his blood,  
Swung by his dizzy heart,  
Roared in a flood,  
And slowed his tick-tock arc...

Late! Late! he cried, and stopped  
For whom his eyes, mind, bones  
Wept, a dying human thing, flopped  
Like a fish upon the changing stones.

Leap-frog, skip back through years' deep  
Broken sidewalks; their shallow  
Pools might deepen into day. O, Sorrow,  
Your mice go tapping through the dust of sleep,

While he, afraid of his imperfect flight,  
Searched all the night for old marks,  
Perfect, somewhere south of sight,  
Sinking in the dark.

Let him begin, like dawn,  
To flicker in his marrow, grow and move



Up veins, then break above familiar ruins  
That know him, lord how long!

Of man he first he took  
A heritage what's new and what's natural  
Of the two the one that's best  
Is which we've chosen  
To be the world.  
And therefore, first.  
Nevertheless, with our poor human policy  
We'd rather not be backed into a choice.

The Natural Thing

Can we say, when all seems lost,  
That losing's natural?  
Or can we find in loss  
A heritage that's won, and also natural?  
Of the two the one that's best  
Is which we've guessed  
To be the worst,  
And therefore, first.  
Nevertheless, with our poor human voice,  
We'd rather not be backed into a choice.

First Song Against Noon

The noon is like calm weather,  
With here a squirrel  
Lying still; and there, stiff feathers  
Floating off some quiet bird,

Like splinters of a flight  
The blood remembers, but is gone.  
O noon, your nickels flash, but I  
Am bred to pennies, and this song.

## Second Song Against Noon

Put on one face for dawn,  
 For night one more;  
 Who can be weak is strong,  
 And has outworn

The cloak of noon,  
 That's neither dead  
 Nor living, but like the moon,  
 Claims a reflected bed.

## A Diminutive Mathematics Lesson

Her stiff chair hard as thirty-five  
Less eight, and yawning toward  
Her bed that like a hive  
Floats humming from a tree no sword  
Of plus or minus would dare disturb,  
She drifts through her erasures,  
Shakes her blonde hair free, then swerves,  
Avoiding wrecking her dream weather  
On the rocks of twenty-five; and spinning twice,  
Sees seven hummingbirds,  
Counts snails to ten, while five blind mice  
Go tick-tack-toeing past her, as she whirls  
Five teacher-breathing dragons  
Overhead...And her dear Raggedy Ann calls,  
"Hurry, hurry, let's have done  
With such dull things, and like small  
Butterflies out-fly the fleeing night..."  
Her pencil down, down drops her head,  
And just beyond her sleeping eye,  
Blue weather whales turn red  
And sound in blanket seas; and there  
The dream-hawk dives on pillow feathers.  
And later on, the moon will swear  
This little girl went flying in stiff weather.

Just Umbrellas in a Library Lobby

Arranged like mushrooms  
Springing up in clusters after rain;  
Or as though the arc of sky  
Had chosen here to come apart;  
Or maybe just umbrellas  
Gathered as for flight,  
And waiting out dull weather.  
  
I'd like to hail one,  
And run up the sails  
With such wind-weathered ease  
That I would go wind-spun  
Beyond this bookish house,  
On red and blue and yellow wings, awhile;  
But always to come  
Tumbling down  
To here,  
This I,  
No worse, or better, except in landing,  
Which goes as hard as ever.

## Cathy's Song

Earth, be my keeper  
And in steeper  
Times than these, make of my bones  
Safe ladder, rising out of stones.

But maybe there's no wisdom  
Found in beating on a drum  
A tune beyond this earth;  
Nor can there be a birth

Unless it echoes in this wild,  
Dark universe, a cry styled  
Inexhaustibly, and bright  
As trout in savage pools of light.

It may be that all's well.  
Or is it just the bells  
That toll in days no one would dream  
Of dying in. No matter. My larger theme

Comes sometime soon, upon the wings  
Of dawn and roots of night, and brings  
Me, higgledy-piggledy, to that sight  
That's born of darkness and light.



## A Poem Against Wishing

As wishing I was in the wind,

I came to a man with a dish

Full of wishes and nails.

And pondering which

Of the two, if he offered, I'd take,

He saw me and said, "They're all made of tin."

Then nailed to a tree all his wishes.

So wishing I went again in the wind,

Punching small holes in the air like a gun.

## Groundhog's Day, 1967

Up pops that Punxsutawney head,  
Like a devil right on time,  
To keep the winter overtime.  
We would prefer, of course, instead  
Of that dumb oracle, a thaw  
Beginning late at night,  
Some timeless and enchanting rite,  
The groundhog doesn't know about, or cause.  
Nevertheless, we are vexed  
By shadows to more cold,  
Before the flowers of the sun unfold.  
And so, we'll prowl these shores for winter's wreck,  
And watch for sails in southern straits,  
And with the groundhog, wait.

## Applause for Leaping

I am pounded by wind  
And rain, yet leap to catch  
The sun. Never mind  
That crow and gull are no match--

They'll match when eye sees,  
Ear catches, all. Let rage  
Be raucous, like a peacock-wind that frees  
The storming noon, or an age.

Brown grows the grass, but green  
Its roots; this magic earth of tricks,  
Faults, rotting lies, is caught between  
Two things: Green leaves and broken sticks.

If face and heart are split,  
The secret's not of mind,  
But stone; there's wit  
Enough when wind unwinds

The burning, careless heart,  
Or melts the face like wax.  
The sun goes north again..Come, Let's start,  
O self; be styled by no calm equinox.

## Song for the Rain Fish

What heart needs to pause,

Or plunge in its blood,

Or its thaws,

Where once was a flood?

My waking is not to blame,  
Nor the angel that sent you with rain,  
To rain on my heart till it's tame;  
Nor what I have lost, or have gained.

But out of the rain swam bright fish,  
Finning and breaking my skin;  
What rose was as light as a wish,  
Or a mayfly spun in a wind.

I'll weave out of winter weeds  
A warmer sun, and throw  
The season down. The rain-fish leads  
Me back to water, and below.

I'll be the waves, the shore;  
Ospreys will hunt in me;  
Or I'll become that bird and fly before  
The wind, or bend like a single tree.

The blood is where we meet,  
Where every fish that rises, breaks

The average calm. I seek  
A shattered face, limitless as space.

No more. One fish is catch enough,  
Or one great cast a life.

Dark clay becomes the stuff  
On which we dive.

Each heart needs to pause,

To fling up its blood

With hurrahs,

Enriching the bone like a flood.

## Love Song

Destructive love cannot go singing--

So bolt the deep blood's gate,

And deeper go, where all things

Truer be; if not, take and create

From fair and foul all things becoming:

Dawn or floods of angels angling down,

Rejoicing in parched clay, like things

Of silence, or terrific sound.

## Song Against Breaking

Sail down to bone and learn  
 How all storms build and burn  
 In marrow first, and break heart's sail.

But then like some great whale,  
 Roar to skin's surface, and blow  
 Heart's breaking whole.

A man without a crime,  
 Dull-wounded in what he might  
 A better wound his heart,  
 A spring beneath his feet,  
 That surprises him to fall straight,  
 As to the nothing left.

Shall I be dead, or long  
 To be part dead, part there who was,  
 Bold and careless as all the world  
 Of all my senses that edge him

And nothing, like of none,  
 And little of the whole  
 That's dead against the light's  
 Arrangement, makes the whole

A space, the sun a rule,  
 Dear alive, hold me closer to the



## Jack-in-the-Box

Arranged and wired in a box,  
Jack jumps his legend out.  
What sounds of doubt  
Are his? Can he be cunning as a fox,  
Or foolish as March Hares?  
No. Jack's of the time,  
A man without a crime,  
Dull-wrapped in what he wears:  
  
A house around his head,  
A spring beneath his feet,  
That catapults him to dull streets,  
Or to the coiling bed.  
  
Shall I be Jack, or long  
To be part fool, part fierce old man,  
Bold and oracular as all the sand  
Of all the shores that echo dawn  
  
And evening, rose of noon,  
And lilies of the night?  
Jack's loud applause for light's  
Arrangement, makes the moon  
  
A dunce, the sun a rule.  
Dear Alice, hold your mirror up to me,

So I can tremble at the grinning tree,  
Or laugh at such a royal fool.

The stream rolled up hills and dingles  
To stream up rivers of stars' dust,  
Leaves whirled past my window pane,  
And it was still the same  
To take my small boat  
On waves more stiller like the sea,  
And make small passage over the sea.

And water's old will be rolled,  
Or into empty waves will roll,  
And ride a sky  
Where ever wind will blow,  
Flash of lightning, crash of rain,  
And wild currents and the sea.

I thought the wind a good man's word,  
And to the wind, and rain,  
And was the best for long time,  
But of the wind,  
Trading wind and rain,  
The storm, or eye of rain?

Between the wind and rain,  
And the wind and rain,  
The wind and rain,  
And the wind and rain.

Something Final, Something Green

Like some great windship's ghost,  
The storm sailed on itself and strained  
To stream up rivers of mind's coast.  
Leaves whipped past my window pane,  
And it was still too soon  
To take my small boat  
Out where waves spilled like big spoons,  
And made small passage seem remote.

Must heart's old sail be furled,  
Or into empty newness whirl?  
What rides a sky  
Where even wind will die?  
Flash of lightning, crack of wind,  
When wild currents end, what begins?

I thought the wind a proud hawk's soul,  
Bred to impenitence, and vain,  
And when has hawk for long lain  
Out of windy weather,  
Trading muscled wing and feather  
For stumps, or eye of mole?

Between the whitecaps  
And the wind-tossed crows,  
I'll take my slender craft  
And fit it to wind's flow.

The agony of anger rudders me,  
 Until it's time again  
 For storm to bend  
 Me landward, where what climbs  
 The currents of my days, my nights,  
 Is something final, something green.

On This or That Side of Breaking

"What are you crying for?" he asked.

"For you, for me, for the world."

--Bernard Malamud

(for Tom and Aldy Molyneux)

I

They'd been to see the setter pup,  
Who'd stand quail, snakes and mice,  
And something began to end for them--  
They listened to the leaves,  
Listened to their cracking,  
And thought of how trees crack,  
Breaking apart in dead of winter.

Broken down to bare parts,  
The pup's head was bred too fine,  
His markings slight,  
And there was something dull  
About his moves,  
As if he'd come to life already old.

Weeds of summer, broken and spare parts  
Of days they'd sprung from,  
Altered not their choice  
To leave behind the leggy pup  
Who hunted down the wind  
For hidden things.

Their eyes, caught by the turning leaves,  
Turned upon the season  
Revolving marrow-deep in them,  
Revolving like the sap of trees,  
Revolving in a blood-wry need for death  
And a finer need to blaze  
Upon the fields of bone and flesh.  
At last one said,  
"It is the fall again."

## II

(the young wife)

Flesh of old women are the leaves;  
Cold sap splits the year.  
The edge of something grows in me,  
Rain-kissed awake to age in tears.  
Flesh of old women are the leaves.

(the husband)

Time beats us at our game,  
Backhands us, smashes us  
Until we're smooth.  
Of all the leaves that fall,  
Not one is mine,  
Nor can I make one stay.  
What's the good of going

If all beginnings end,  
And we've no choice?

(the friend)

Beginnings break us,  
Not the end of things.  
The first day of the summer sun  
Is the winter's moon begun.  
These fiery leaves broke months ago,  
But live much brighter now than then.  
We live in old beginnings.

(the young wife)

I flow through earth. No more.  
What's north of me waits cold as stone;  
The time stays warmer here.  
Ding-dong, ding-dong. The bells  
I hear say oranges and lemons.  
Stay! Stay! My earth is passing;  
Ages weep for me. I'll be a gray  
And wizened weed  
And break before the wind...  
Old hag! Dry stuff of life! I renounce you,  
Take you not for what you seem,  
But what you are: deep-wrinkled fear  
And what I may become.



My blue-eyed son, my colors wear  
When all my colors fade,  
When all my former gods are dead...  
O flesh, turn backward  
To my wet beginning.

(the husband)

I'll go one day,  
Hissing like a whisper jet,  
To some sunset,  
And forego all pain, crime,  
War and death. My son to be,  
Shall I break faith with you?  
You who will, like a god,  
Perhaps, not understand our folly,  
Nor that finer need  
For understanding  
Of dead leaves.  
When did I kiss  
Your pale head free of sleep?

(the friend)

We have already broken faith  
With one, loosed our ways  
Upon the young dog's age.  
Tricked him, broke him for a moment,  
To our hands, then left him there,

Scenting early quail, snakes and mice  
In this poor year.

(the husband)

Is something broken, something made?

(the friend)

To live on this or that side of breaking,  
Or on the edge of aging flesh,  
Is, at least, to be someplace.

(the young wife)

Old woman, mother, witch,  
Shall I take your new old hands  
And paper face  
And make a place for them  
In the house where I will go?

(the husband)

What can we know of love, humility,  
Or of the death of bone?

(the friend)

Remembrances of rain  
Will wake us on some reckless hill,  
And there we will begin,  
Caught in the same bright, bitter sun,

(the young wife)

To hoe a row of dear cabbages,  
To teach the children how to sing,  
Teach them love and how to dance.

(the husband)

And all the other things we forgot--  
Teach them hate, and laughter,  
Tears and loneliness. And more.

(the friend)

Each day has sun and moon,  
Is hot and cold, dark and light--  
Each day has love and hate,  
And all the rest we remember.  
Cloak the children with an eagle's wing,  
And in that sky they'll learn to sing.

(the young wife)

Look! Look! Our dear kings and queens  
Are dying, dead, or underground,  
Are stick-men dancing jigs...  
O where is Alice? Where the looking glass?

(the husband)

Which side? Which side?

(the friend)

Yes. Yes. This world's a fine place,  
An awful place, a quiet, shrieking place.  
We cannot stop! Let's to our lives.

(the young wife)

In all that dead land?  
Where my bones are falling down?

(the husband)

There? To hear the thud of death  
In every noon-dark sky?

(the friend)

Yes. And, living, find a way across.

### III

And they remembered the young dog,  
And leaves in the turning year,  
Remembered the sounds  
Weaving in the wind,  
Out of the wind,  
Out of the ticking  
That told the season;  
And remembered the color  
That knit them together,  
The color of pheasants in autumn.

Was it the young dog they remembered?  
Or was it the clatter  
Of something on nothing,  
Like voice scraping air?

The fields are overflowing  
With the growing surf and rip of night.

The three of them head home,  
Like small animals racing sundown.

## Cathy at the Dentist

Gassed out cold, she spiralled down,  
Down through a painless sky,  
Past trees that danced away;  
While faces, as through lace, stared round  
And round her, tumbling like box-kites,  
Then vanished in a figure-eight.  
And voices, as in play, spoke  
Backwards to the Queen, spade-royal  
In her court, who answered sideways,  
"Rose-fed cats are quick..." but broke  
From this, as Cathy fell on loyal  
Roses, blushing as the ceiling swayed.  
And when she woke, the morning bells  
Had rung; and even sun had changed  
From when she'd first arranged  
To race it, days before she fell.  
And in her dream, she said, the scent  
Was warm, like summer in a tent.

A Silver Playing Card

Father, when I look at earth  
Of late, and want to fall away,  
Life-shuffled, I am reminded, first,

Of how you dealt the cards and stayed  
All afternoon, hot in your skill,  
But cool behind your paper face;

And then of how, with loss, your will  
To win endured, until the hands,  
You and your cronies built,

Outlasted afternoons and ran  
To legend, where you've grown  
More lasting, stubborn as the land.

Father, in Carolina I found a stone;  
And being dealt to it, and it to me,  
I stopped in air as thin as shade, bone-

Deep in light, and strained to see  
Those playing hands and ancient face,  
To ask if being heir to stone be legacy

Enough? or trembling in a secret place,  
Humility? Ah, come from that darkness,  
Come and steady me in this old race;



In order place the stones that pressed  
 The dinosaur asleep. Let me possess  
 Both sun and moon, so I can wrest  
 From stone, a silver playing card.

### In Butterflying Fields

Remember the fields above the house,  
The butterflying fields where once  
You ran with a flying net in front,  
In fits of streaming skill.

Recall the Monarch's wings, dusty  
In the dry clover, rising in puffs  
Of hurried alarm, rising like  
Rare symphonic timbre above  
The lunge of awkward arm and net,  
To sweeter things than woven string  
And wonder at the woven beauty  
  of a slender wing.

And after the butterflying days had  
Ended, out of the fields you came,  
Sunburned and brave, an empty  
Bottle, a torn net, the first defeat,  
To watch an early moon pursue  
Giant moths across a window screen,  
While dark shadows flutter against  
The night in butterflying fields  
So soon bereft of color.

The Marble Shooters

Late afternoon's the time

I stop and watch

The marble shooters climb

Or fall in circles of defeat.

I like to look beyond to men-at-cards,

And still beyond, to streets

I do not know, where night

Comes circling through the trees

And takes itself a different light.

I glance back, also, to the fall

Of faces, and lost circles:

Winners, losers, all return, call

To me as I go again to lose or win

The day, my snake-eye in reserve

To save from ruin, maybe to begin

The climb again, high in the chalk-

Cold wind chutes, swaying north

Again, in feathered silence of the hawk.

I call to faces, call to tell

Them something that I know:

About the sound of bells,

Or how the blood, in flowing,  
Echoes back along itself. O heart,  
Your time is young and old and hovering...

I launch myself between late afternoon  
And night, my quarrel not with loss,  
But how to spin from marbles a new moon.

A Lion King of Kites

Far bolder than high-flying days,

He upward with the wind said,

"Hey! We will our brothers praise,

And praise that useless silence of the dead,

And carry on the grass our whistling bride,

Sprung from the earth on slender thread."

And far across the wind he strayed,

Too far from where he held the string,

Until too soon, too soon, I saw what played

Upon his planetary kite could bring

Him (falling down) to bone,

To secret bridges, and the ring

On sharper stone, of kingdoms grown

Into the blue, blue sky. And was he more,

Or less, a lion-king of kites, along?

And those enormous skies he (rag-tailed) soared--

Were they alone as he, more widely spaced?

Anarchic motion of the wind's old war

Labored on the land he raced

And lifted him awhile with skinny ease,

Until he upward said, "These ruins praise."

And, falling, found the roots that hold the breeze.

## The Pigeon Walk

O my sister, the rain is dusty,  
And the stones I gather, like berries  
That we took in summer on the hill,  
Are laced with dirt; and these,  
My only prize, will last until  
Rain rakes our eyes, until our skill  
Springs slender, keen as light  
Caught in a sun flung kite.  
But we have travelled from the pigeon walk,  
And those thin wings will stalk  
Us in the rain, in dust that skips  
Along the strata of our skin,  
Where lines from that old lash trip  
At corners and, like night, spin  
Webs that hold us in an ancient flow.  
But O my sister, what holds us grows  
And flowers in the earth before in us;  
And we are what we are, thrust  
Far beyond the pigeon walk, but not  
Beyond the stones, whacked by the dinosaur,  
That teach us, first, of how the flowers  
Wake us; and then of how the moth  
Flutters down in every night, in every rain  
That rains along the oval stain  
And new antiquity of every dawn.

All the Cries

What now above the din  
And struggle of a gin-  
Soaked remembering?  
Shall I think to bring  
A basket of gray weeds  
To place between the needs  
Of those obscure demands?  
And does it lessen the stand  
I've taken with the trucks  
That rumble through the muck  
And concrete edge of night?  
And will it be all right  
To skip with ease on broken  
Sidewalks, hurling token  
Gestures at the cracked sky?  
What else is there above the lie  
And easy faith of all the cries  
That waddle through the mud  
And dust, the frequent thud  
Of death in many noon-dark skies?

I cannot go beside a blinking  
Nickel-neon plaza, nor to a shrinking  
Sweet-drunk stoop, where dull mice stumble  
Strangely, like dialogues of skull.

I shall sit on a drumming, militant shore,  
 Awhile, watching dark gulls play above the roar.



## Who Will Save

## I

Play-picking his brave way  
Across the heavy, pyramided pipes  
(This after candy at the candy store),  
The boy slipped and fell  
Across the clanging pipes.  
I ran to him to save myself  
As much as him, young Icarus  
Flung to earth, or like Achilles,  
This pale-faced boy, caught deep  
Within his fear, world lost,  
And trapped within the black pipes.

And for a time I fought the pipes,  
Cursed strongly at the stronger weight,  
Until I felt my lungs  
Rasp in defiance of my will,  
Almost subdue my will, but not before  
The pipes moved with a crack...  
The boy, his foot dull red and older,  
Limped free, but found in freedom his real pain.

## II

Another took him home,  
And I walked up the street,  
A western man,

On to the next town,  
The next villain in the scene...  
The strain, perhaps, caused me to dream.

### III

But all that afternoon  
I thought about the boy,  
And larger things, like trees  
And trucks and sunken dinosaurs;  
And how the boy, had it been dark,  
Might have gnawed his leg clean through,  
As muskrats often do in traps.  
But no. Not like that at all:  
More subtle desolation of the bone  
We use to free us, as when we wake  
To find the coil-spring trap sprung  
Through us, and around. Then, then  
We cannot gnaw, but try another  
Waking, one more way, a newer face.  
It is nice, being a child  
And being saved, but who will save...  
(And how could I forget the pipes?  
Or he, the paradox of pain?)  
  
I thought about the boy and me,  
Until the sun rode camels  
Out of sight, and swallows

Fell from spires, and rose again  
On brittle wings into bell-ringing dusk.

## Memo to the Birds

Corrupt with jetsam and the jeers  
Of papers to be read, my desk  
Waits like a gunman of the West,  
The long street where we meet, bereft of cheer.

Or this: That all is lost upon my sea,  
Heaves sluggishly; and I am lost  
On it, this kingdom come and rarely crossed.  
Ho hum. I've seen it all before in dreams.

But in the bricks above my head  
Some unseen birds are building nests.  
I hear their dull beaks pressed  
Click-clicking to the wall I've never read.

But outside, I listen to their building sounds,  
Like something that I'd like to say..  
I make, instead, a paper nest for play,  
And scrawl dull and confusing on the ground.

On the Bridge

Next year, after all this, maybe  
I shall meet you on the bridge,  
The one on the narrows, where  
The River finally meets ocean;  
And there, in all that cobweb-  
Like world of steel forms  
And sagging cables, maybe  
We shall talk after all this,  
And say how long it has been,  
And how nothing has changed,  
And how the narrows are really very wide.

(And below, in the merging waters,  
We shall see old river men,  
In turtle neck sweaters  
And crusted sea caps,  
Intoning things to the shore.)

But for now I must consider  
The bridge and the many ways  
That approach it, and I must  
Consider the deformation of man.

And then, after all the thinking  
And all the doing that needed to be done,

After the last, strong wedges  
 Of geese have dropped into the chute  
 That leads to the Southern marshes,  
 Then I shall meet you on the bridge,  
 The one on the narrows, where  
 The river finally meets ocean, maybe.

The Princess Stella

I

Between the woman with no head  
And Blaze, the Human Torch,  
The Princess Stella wiggled  
On her platform and was bold.  
But from the Midway crowd,  
A knifer with a dream of bellies  
Pinned inside his crooked eye,  
Ran to her where she danced,  
Slashed through her scream,  
And on his muddied blade  
Her dance slowed down and stopped.

(The woman with no head  
Regained her mind and ran;  
While Blaze, the Human Torch,  
Burned out and gasped on air.)

He strutted where she danced,  
Where lately she was bold,  
And waved his carving knife  
High in a pagan cheer, then choked,  
As on his blade another belly bled.

II

The Magic Man said this:  
A knifing man was he,

Cut matches from girls' lips,  
 And curved his sterling blades  
 Around them long ago in tents--  
 He built for them a whistling cage,  
 Until his eye, in dreams, became  
 The instrument of rage.

### III

And now they lie, those two,  
 The Princess and the knifing man,  
 Grotesque and out of shape,  
 Worn out and quiet in a pile.



## Notes to the Strangest Crow I Ever Heard

There were some things  
I knew last night: the snow  
Was first, descending  
And reflecting over all, a slow  
Fall down to dark, bereft  
Of all but eye hurting cold.  
The next was how a fox left  
Tracks in snow, a bold  
Trail I'd followed long before  
I found a track more difficult.  
Another was the warmth,  
Woven like a muffler in the storm.

O but when I heard  
The strangest crow turn lyrical and die,  
I began to look toward a birth,  
The strange flight of a winter butterfly.

## Of Flight and Freezing

White moth of the winter thaw,  
You danced like spring, and  
Could not see the snow clouds  
Fighting from the north. I saw  
And wondered if the land  
You trembled in was loud  
With fraud, your flight more  
Brave than I who waited  
With dull Winchester at hand  
For deer to come to orchard.  
But when the wind sang down it said  
This is no hollow, songless land.

And when I saw the moth track  
Nothing on the air, still flying  
In the dusk toward an evergreen,  
I rose and chose a different track;

And when the snow came in the night  
And stayed my earnest wandering,  
I wondered if the wind was right,  
And dreamed of flight and freezing.

The Outer Road

The outer road I haven't reached  
Flashed by beyond the hills  
Like wind, but more than that,  
Was wild and torn,  
A track through wilderness.

I crouch beneath a naked tree  
With fevers of the brain,  
And watch a hawk rise free  
Above the ravished plain,  
Above the hills of wilderness.

And later, in dreaming scenes,  
The naked tree turned green, grew  
Wings for me to rise like hawk,  
To soar in air intense as that out there  
Beyond the outer road and yet beyond.

# Among the Pines

The lake on lesser wings  
 Circles in the minnow's rush  
 And slides into place; the dusk  
 Comes slowly on osprey wings.

My place among the pines  
 Secured, I sat and heard  
 The lazy crows. Dark lord,  
 The slender fear is in the pines,

And I am anchored  
 By no more than dead leaves,  
 Rustling through a grief  
 That is too deep to shed.

In a Wooden Time

I

His tattered soul unfurled,  
And falling through the night, he feels  
Like Atlas, somehow lost of world.  
He hears a song of potter's wheels.

Far towers carry something, something  
That, like dust, comes to him after rain,  
Or when his dog cries when bells ring...  
On clay he wants to sign his name.

His house is without son;  
And, leaning like a drunk, bereft  
Of beam and beacon, has never won  
A royal line, the promise never kept.

II

Last year's fish (not biblical, but caught  
In summer's drying streams), waxed-paper  
Wrapped and cold, will take no fly. He ought  
To feed the neighbor's cats; or take them where

The skunks, in dark lines, sag and touch  
The ground between his house and theirs.  
And the chimney has a squirrel, a gray of such  
Heroic cut, he hesitates to buy a snare.

There has been too much dying

Here, he knows, too many bones. The time  
Is made of wood; the circus ring  
Cast by the crowd hangs Jesus for his crime.

## III

Regarding all--his death, the wars,  
The bones, all nature lost--  
He wonders what the pigeons feel when crossed  
With evening bells, beyond his shores.

The steeples far away, like weapons,  
Hold him hatless on a peeling porch;  
The swallows out of chaos come, their search  
Begins by water for a fallen son.

He swears he has come far, the porch  
Is miles from where he fell. His wound,  
Not healed, aches in the night and sounds,  
Jack-hammer deep, clay chords of earth;

But in dreams the dark place is not dark enough,  
Nor deep; and chaos sometimes flings a brief  
Laugh, bold relief against his grief,  
His only brother blind and out of touch.

## IV

He says, "O father, did you not see death

A thousand times from your high cell?  
And when you fled that night did hell  
Or heaven fight to win your only death?"

Something back along his days  
He tries to see--a shadow, more like smoke  
From pipes. (Outside the fence, four rope-  
Spun girls spin thistle-ward.) His memory sways,  
Then leaves. O light, masking light, sing after night:  
All nights he has endured and, like a root,  
Surrounds.

He waits.

At dawn, by boat,  
He fishes, casts through mist a red fly,  
Frayed and old from many fish. He glides,  
Controlled, past otters come to glide  
Through mud. His red fly, high upon  
Its wings, erupts; and rod is arched along  
Another day, played skillfully, played...

(The ring unto darkness comes;  
Our father, shadow him and  
Blow like whales your blue rum  
Down his sea-sprung search for land.)